**IN THE CLAIMS:**

1. (Previously Presented) A method for proxying data access commands from a first storage system to a second storage system in a storage system cluster, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving a data access command at the first storage system that is directed to the second storage system;

forwarding the received data access command to the second storage system via a cluster interconnect;

processing the data access command at the second storage system;

returning a response from the second storage system to the first storage system via the cluster interconnect; and

sending a response to the data access command to a client from the first storage system.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the storage systems are storage appliances and wherein the data access command is received at a proxy port associated with the first storage appliance.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the proxy port comprises a physical port.

4. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the proxy port comprises a virtual port associated with a physical port.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the response comprises requested read data.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the response comprises an acknowledgement of a write operation.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the response comprises a predetermined set of read data.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the cluster interconnect comprises a direct link between the first storage system and the second storage system.

9. -16. (Cancelled)

17. (Previously Presented) A method for proxying data access commands in a first storage system to a second system in a storage system cluster, the method comprising the steps of:

analyzing a received data access command at the first storage system~~,~~;

forwarding the received data access command to the second storage system; and

processing the received data access command at the second storage system.

18. (Original) The method of claim 17 further comprising the steps of;

returning a response from the second storage system to the first storage system; and

sending a response to the data access command to the client from the first storage system.

19. (Original) The method of claim 17 wherein the step of forwarding further comprises the step of forwarding the data access command to the second storage system via a cluster interconnect.

20. (Original) The method of claim 19 wherein the cluster interconnect comprises a fibre channel link.

21. (Original) The method of claim 19 wherein the cluster interconnect comprises a direct link between the first storage system and the second storage system.

22. (Original) The method of claim 17 further comprising the step of receiving the data access command is at a proxy port of the first storage system.

23. (Original) The method of claim 22 wherein the proxy port comprises a physical port.

24. (Original) The method of claim 22 wherein the proxy port comprises a virtual port associated with the physical port.

25. (Original) The method of claim 18 wherein the response comprises requested read data.

26. (Original) The method of claim 18 wherein the response comprises an acknowledgement of the write operation.

27. (Previously Presented) A computer readable medium, including program instructions executing on a computer, for proxying data access commands from a first storage system to a second storage system in a storage system cluster, the computer readable medium including instructions for performing the steps of:

receiving a data access command at the first storage system that is directed to the second storage system;

forwarding the received data access command to the second storage system via a cluster interconnect;

processing the data access command at the second storage system;

returning a response from the second storage system to the first storage system via the cluster interconnect; and

sending a response to the data access command to a client from the first storage system.

28. (Previously Presented) A system for proxying data access commands from a first storage system to a second storage system connected via a cluster interconnect, the system comprising:

means for receiving a data access command at the first storage system that is directed to the second storage system;

means for forwarding the received data access command to the second storage system via a cluster interconnect;

means for processing the data access command at the second storage system;

means for returning a response from the second storage system to the first storage system via the cluster interconnect; and

means for sending a response to the data access command to a client from the first storage system.

29. (Original) The method of claim 28 wherein storage systems are storage appliances and the data access command is received at a proxy port associated with the first storage appliance.

30. (Original) The method of claim 29 wherein the proxy port comprises a physical port.

31. (Original) The method of claim 29 wherein the proxy port comprises a virtual port associated with a physical port.

32. (Original) The method of claim 28 wherein the response comprises requested read data.

33. (Original) The method of claim 28 wherein the response comprises an acknowledgement of a write operation. 34. (Original) The method of claim 28 wherein the response comprises a predetermined set of read data.

34. (Original) The method of claim 28 wherein the response comprises a predetermined set of read data.

35. (Previously Presented) A method for proxying data access commands from a first storage system to a second storage system in a storage system cluster, the method comprising:
receiving a data access command at the first storage system that is directed to the second storage system;
forwarding a data access command from the first storage system to the second storage system;
processing the data access command at the second storage system; and
returning a response from the second storage system to the first storage system.

36. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35 further comprises sending a response to the data access command from the first storage system.

37. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35 wherein the data access command is forwarded via a cluster interconnect.

38. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35 further comprises receiving by the first storage system the data access command that is directed to the second storage system.

39. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35 further comprises returning the response from the first storage system to a client.

40. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 39 wherein the response is returned via the cluster interconnect.